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19¢ Dec: 28/66

Women's Work in the War.

A LETTER TO SENATOR SUMNER.

New York, 18th September, 1866.

Dear Sir,—Your speeches on "The Metric System," and on "Art in the National Capital" have duly reached me, under the favor of your frank; and it is with much gratification that I observe in them evidences that there may be fully occupied legislators who fit themselves to speak with intelligent—and, so far as concerns the points in discussion, with exhaustive—appreciation of other agencies than their own in the activities of current civilization.

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For until recognition like yours is spontaneous on all sides, the professors and practitioners of the various forces of human society, it is obvious to the observant and reflective mind, must continue to dissipate, distract and weaken, instead of to strengthen, assimilate and centralize each other's contributions towards the common understanding which must precede the divergence of universal and impartial beneficence.

But is it to be understood from expressions like "such excellence in sculpture as is consistent with the condition of her sex," that you enunciate or imply the doctrine of the inferiority of the female sex, as a body, for art; and, collaterally, for other pursuits requiring extra mental endowment and culture?—for what you say of Miss Hosmer is understood to be only, and professedly, a concession to an exceptional individual.

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Throughout nearly the whole of the war, it was within the scope of my assigned duties as Assistant Secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, to make myself familiar with, and occasionally to survey in person, the chief points of the field from which that volunteer and yet *quasi* official organization—so representative of and exceptional to this country and its present plane of civilization—mainly derived its supplies in kind, *i. e.*,

he entire loyal territory of the United States east of the Mississippi (though most other parts of the globe outside the seat of the rebellion occasionally contributed such supplies also); and it was my specific duty as the "Supply Correspondent" of its Central Office—to none of its other officers anywhere, in fact, being assigned the function as a permanent specialty—to stimulate contributions to its store-houses in general, and locally to oversee the arrival and acknowledge the receipt of all delivered at the head quarters of the Commission in Washington—that is, nearly the whole of the bulk of supplies collected in the East. These supplies, amounting in aggregate value to many millions of dollars—some fifteen millions I should name as a rough estimate, in the absence of a completed official one—were almost universally collected, assorted, and despatched, and re-collected, re-assorted, and re-despatched, by women, representing with great impartiality, every grade of society in the Republic; but occasionally, in the first year of the war—previous to the work being taken up by local organizations of women—this business was transacted, at some of the centres, by men. The latter, however, soon began to do the work in such a clumsy and inefficient way (with some exceptions * * * *), that it became my duty to represent the facts to the Commission, and to ask a remedy. Among my official reports to my superior officers is the record of these facts, and of the data, extracted from the supply books of the Commission, by which I illustrated them. The explanation which, at the time and in this instance, I volunteered (for, of course, I was not always bound, unless specially called upon, to furnish my theory of the train of causality of such results as, in the routine of my duty, I brought to the attention of my superior officers), was that the women gave their personal, undivided and unremitting attention and heart to the work; while the men, though entering it at first *con amore*, began to look at it, after the sixty days allotted for the war had elapsed, as a troublesome, time-taking, sentimental excresence, outside of real money-making business; and left it as (probably unpaid) overwork to subordinates. But further experience and reflection led me to the belief that this reason was insufficient to explain the facts; and that their solution was mainly to be found in the absolute superiority of the female sex for this and other kinds of work requiring extra patience and

endurance, an intuitive recognition of the relative fitness of details, and a conscientious methodizing thereof.

In presenting testimony derived from the results of daily business record and its figures, I have nothing to do—especially when I offer it to a scholar and publicist—with the general question, whether the man or the woman, either *in esse* or *in posse*, is the falser or the more truthful, the more spiteful or the more magnanimous, the more or less affectionate, the more or less continent, or, in any sense, the stronger or weaker, the better or worse. Milton's, or Pascal's, or Mrs. Jameson's theories on the subject are not in order; nor is it to the purpose whether or not unenfranchised women, as is sometimes asserted of clergymen, of recognized strict professors of religion among the male laity, of slaves, of those occupying inferior positions generally in their intercourse with those filling superior ones, of all to whom the written or unwritten laws of society prohibit the use of the worldly modes of self-assertion and self-defence interchangeably customary among those whose positions are measurably eqnal—whether they are more or less apt than others to resort, under the instincts of self-preservation and self-aggrandizement, otherwise unprovided for, to combinations which those who are allowed such use pronounce evidence of weakness, deceit or falsity. I simply, with a more general and more important object of duty, repeat the assertion I have heretofore officially made in a narrower sphere of responsibility, that the chief work in the practice of the Sanitary Commission—whatever were its theories of inception—viz., that of providing the means for ministering to the physical needs of the soldiers, (or General and Special Relief, as the two different forms of ministration were technically called,) was exceedingly well done by women, and comparatively ill done by men. *Dux fœmina facti* may be truly said of every Aid Society that co-operated with the Sanitary Commission; and of such not far short of ten thousand were in active operation, at one time or other, during the war.*

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* By Aid Societies I mean all organizations of women in affiliation with the Central authorities of the Commission, from the Branches having their Centres in the chief cities to the small village sewing circles where only "two or three were gathered together."

I say the chief work in its practice, because, though, in one sense, the preventive, cautionary, disciplinary and strictly federalizing and nationalizing influences of the Commission, whether acted, spoken or only tacitly suggested, were, in the view of the person of culture and forecast, probably its highest attainments, even for the present, and its medical, statistical and otherwise scientific duties incontestibly so as regards the future, yet even these depended for their necessary means on the labor of the women, and on its accompanying and magnetic enthusiasm. This was the case none the less because each individual of the vast majority of those women had, in her co-operation with the Commission's Branches, no thought beyond the simply affectionate one of sending a pair of socks or a bottle of cooling cordial to her son, her husband, or her brother—or the son, the husband or the brother of some other woman in his stead—down in the swamps of Virginia, or beneath the burning sun of Alabama. For instance, what could the Commission have done, for the carrying out and completion of its more intellectual labors, without the three millions of money raised through the Sanitary Fairs, or the million and a half contributed by California and the other regions of the Pacific slope? Yet no one personally familiar with the internal history of the Sanitary Commission, or with the projectors and supporters of those fairs, would for an instant pretend that as many tens of thousands as there were millions could have been raised, if the money had been asked for in the name of the scientific and historical interests of the Commission, instead of in the name of the physical needs of the "boys in blue," who were at that moment fighting their country's battle. Nor, as regards the receipts from California and the other territory west of the Rocky Mountains, will any candid person, I apprehend, undertake to imply that it was from any colder or more abstruse motives than those of patriotism, benevolence and affection that their just-amassed piles of gold, and just-smelted bars of silver were poured into the Treasury of the Commission by the last offshoots from the lately-placed population of the New World—the miners, whose hands are still hard and rough from their contact with the pick-axe, the shovel and the rocker, and the Gubernatorial candidates who, as Sanitary colporteurs, carry sacks of flour on their backs for hundreds

of miles. The first General Secretary and Organizer of the Commission, Mr. Olmsted, well understood, as may be seen by that brief circular but remarkable document "To the Loyal Women of America," and by his pamphlet "What they have to do who Stay at Home," that though the compacted brains of the Commission were chiefly at work within its own internal organization, yet the large heart and vast system of arteries, and nerves, and fibres, and the multitudinous hands, which supplied and vitalized, and strengthened and wrought for those brains, stretched their limitless lines from one fireplace to another, and from church to schoolhouse, all over the millions of square miles of the loyal Union. And this none the less that in founding the catechetical system of the Commission, in its scientific relations with the army, he originated that statistical and historical life of the organization which, under the elaboration of Mr. Elliott and his successor and assistants, will, when all the executive members of its body are dead and forgotten, most commend it to the Future. If there be such a thing as estimating the claims of gratitude in figures, (and the sooner the pecuniary, as well as the sentimental, side of all interhuman transactions is recognized, and the results of the philosophy and science—not the abuse—of trade are introduced into all the relations of society, the better it will be for all its members,) then the acknowledgments due from the Sanitary Commission and the country to the supplementary supporters of the Government Executive during the civil war may be easily graded, and that simply by comparing the Commission's receipts and their sources with each other. In round numbers the figures might, perhaps, stand something like this:

Receipts in kind from the Women's Aid Societies, auxiliary to the U. S. Sanitary Commission		$15,000,000
" in cash from the Sanitary Fairs (projected almost simultaneously, and without mutual knowledge, by two ladies conjointly in Chicago, and a lady in Boston, and initiated by the former) . . .	$3,000,000	
" in cash from men, women and children west of the Rocky Mountains . .	1,500,000	
Cash for?	4,500,000	15,000,000

Receipts in cash from the fathers, husbands, brothers and children of Aid-Society Women, east of the Rocky Mountains,	400,000	
" in cash from men not connected with such women	75,000	
" in cash from Life Insurance Companies and other scientific-financial institutions,	25,000	5,000,000
		$20,000,000

The three million set down to the women's fairs do not represent, by probably half as much again, the actual receipts therefrom—the balance being used for the local demands of the Branches—nor is there indicated a sum, which must have aggregated not less than a million, contributed directly to the funds of the Women's Aid Societies, and not finding its way, in the shape of cash, into the Central Treasury; but as, in both instances, the money may be said to have been absorbed in, and to be represented by, the supplies in kind, it ought not perhaps to be taken into account. On the other hand, it is only fair to say that to the men's contributions should be added the aggregated value of the use, free or at reduced charges, of Express, Railroad, Steamship, Telegraphic and other carrying corporations, which may be roughly estimated perhaps at a million—though it is very safe to say that, on no solicitations addressed to them, would the million have been forthcoming in hard cash. Nor should it be forgotten that, when not drawn off by theological affinities with a rival organization, the clergymen of the country have a just claim to a share of the credit due to the active women of their parishes for their devotion and faithfulness—often sorely tried—in behalf of the Sanitary Commission and its objects.

The signs of the times, not only in this New World, but in the old one, plainly indicate, according to the best qualified observers, that the question of the enfranchisement of women will soon emerge from the distant domain of speculation and prediction—of theory and prophecy—of philosophy and poetry, into the more immediately practical field of politics and legislation, and as you are likely to be active in whatever movement

may stir the van of national progress, I give you, for whatever you may think it worth, the testimony of one who has been, he hopes, an appreciative observer of a certain class of *à propos* facts from, as he believes, the best stand-point that has existed.
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Yours truly, with great respect,

ALFRED J. BLOOR.

Hon'ble Chas. Sumner,
U. S. Senate.

Boston, 17th Nov., '66.

My dear Sir,

I have read with much interest your instructive letter, in which you make a revelation with regard to the co-operative support of the Sanitary Comm'n by women, which takes me by surprise.

Accept my thanks, and believe me, dear sir,

Very truly yours,

CHARLES SUMNER.

Alfred J. Bloor, Esq.,
110 Broadway,
New York.

My dear Sir,

I have read your paper with great interest, and thank you very much, in behalf of women, for the liberal and just sentiments you have expressed. * * * * *
* * I should be exceedingly glad to see such a document given to the public.

I remain,

Truly yours,

ELIZ'TH BLACKWELL.

Nov. 24th, 126 2d Avenue.

A. J. Bloor, Esq.,
110 Broadway.

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NOTE.

Justice requires me to add that since the above was written I find myself compelled to admit—what I did not before feel bound to take notice of—that a quite low estimate is put on the value of much of the medico-statistical labors of the Commission by some who are recognized as authorities in such matters, and who were conversant with the labors specified. I am the more careful to state this, as, being myself without a medical education, I am incompetent to be an authoritative witness on either side of the question. Thus critically incompetent, and busied, while connected with the Commission, in the immediate duties of correspondence and administration delegated to me, I was glad to take it for granted—whatever was rumored to the contrary—that its scientific labors had all the value claimed or implied for them. And I do not now know that they had not. I earnestly trust they had and have. There was certainly sufficient capacity, industry and devotedness applied to those labors to justify any expectations of them. But in adding this letter as one item to the probably multitudinous *mémoires pour servir*, printed or unprinted, from which—in connection with its official archives—the history of the Sanitary Commission will some day doubtless be compiled, I cannot allow a feeling of prepossession to tamper with those historical elements which must always be inviolate to those who recognize the august relations of history to the future, and the intimate and sacred bond between our utterance of the truth and the improvement and well-being of posterity. Such prepossession, however amiable in the light of partial fellowship, or to the after-dinner apprehension of Mutual Admiration Societies, would, to the clear conscience, be only less criminal in essence, and less sad to contemplate, than the attempted suppression or distortion of such elements for the gratification of personal pique and revenge—an atrocity before which the transient and comparatively inconsequential misdemeanors against its current laws, for which society allots the penitentiary and the treadmill, sink into harmless insignificance.

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Office of the U. S. Sanitary Commission,

823 BROADWAY, NEW YORK,

October 31st, 1864.

Sir:

I have the honor of informing you that, at the recent quarterly session of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, you were elected an associate member.

I transmit to you herewith a list of the gentlemen who were elected at the same time, as also a list of those previously elected. The printed documents of the Commission will henceforward be sent to you.

I am, Sir,

Yours, respectfully,

General Secretary.

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